GOP scandals fizzle as campaign issues

By Morton Kondracke
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WASHINGTON — Wheat. Milk. ITT. The Watergate caper. The $10 million. The postal bonds. Harry Steward. Warner-Lambert and National Steel. The Sharpstown Follies.

Those are the Washington shorthand words for 10 scandals or potential scandals that the Democrats, wish as hard as they might, cannot seem to turn into the likes of Dixon-Yates, Teapot Dome, the vicuna coat or the deep freeze — scandals that revolt the nation and affect elections.

The Democrats' frustration is compounded by the fact that there is not just one smelly fish lying around the capital, but a dozen or more, and no one seems to be paying attention.

Before the wheat deal popped up, Democrats were assuring themselves that if just one more case broke, the country would start noticing all the others and begin putting together the words "rascals" and "out."

Farmers feel cheated

Well, wheat popped. Indeed, it is receiving some attention, but chiefly, one suspects, because a sizable group of voters—wheat belt farmers—feels directly cheated. There is mounting evidence that the Agriculture Department tipped off large grain exporters in advance that a massive wheat sale to Russia had been worked out, enabling the exporters to buy

SEN. ADLAI E. STEVENSON

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from unsuspecting farmers at $1.32 a bushel instead of $1.91, where the price is now.

Despite the impact that the wheat issue may be having in Kansas and in Congress, it has yet to hit with force nationally, and it does not seem to be having the this-is-the-last-straw effect that Democrats hoped for.

Some Democrats, including former party chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien, contend that the average citizen has become so cynical that even burglary — as indisputably occurred in the Watergate case—will not faze him.

Supporting O'Brien's dreary outlook last week was Richard J. Johnson of Rolling Meadows, Ill., a self-proclaimed "little old voter" who was asked by public television to represent other average Americans. He said he was "not too impressed" with the break-in and bugging of Democratic headquarters even though two former White House aides have been indicted.

"The way I look at it," said Johnson, "it's just politics."

Attempt to revive ITT case

In spite of O'Brien's pessimium, the Democrats are still casting around for new scandals, in hope that one might trip the right wire with the electorate. A team of House investigators, for example, is attempting to revive the ITT case by looking into the tax ruling that made it possible for the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. to acquire the Hartford Fire Insurance Co. in history's largest merger.

Republicans have their own explanations for the public's unscandalized condition, of course. The chief one is that there

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